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SUBJECT: MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENT TO COMBAT BIOTERRORISM

REF: OTTAWA 257

Classified By: Robert P. Mikulak, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Reftel requested guidance in response to GOC questions concerning U.S. thinking on how best to address bioterrorism multilaterally. DFAIT Senior Policy Officer David MacDuff asked whether the USG intends to raise this issue in the G-8 Nonproliferation Directors' Group, and suggested that other venues, such as the Roma-Lyon process or the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, might also be appropriate fora. Post is requested to respond, drawing on background and key points provided in paragraph 6 below, to MacDuff or other appropriate GOC interlocutors.

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BACKGROUND FOR POST  
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¶2. (U) The United States addresses bioterrorism-related issues through a variety of multilateral fora, including the G-8, meetings of the BWC States Parties, several elements of the United Nations System, the Global Health Security Initiative, regional security bodies such as the ASEAN regional forum, and direct regional engagement through State's Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP). Efforts to combat bioterrorism encompass preventive measures to deter, disrupt, or impede terrorist efforts to acquire a biological weapons capability; measures to improve detection technologies and disease surveillance to identify an attack; measures to promote the development and stockpiling of medical countermeasures; and steps to prepare to carry out and coordinate a wide range of law enforcement, public health, and other tasks necessary for effective response to and recovery from an attack. Given this wide, multi-sectoral scope, there is no single "best fit" multilateral venue in which to tackle bioterrorism issues.

¶3. (U) Within the G8, bioterrorism is addressed through the Bioterrorism Experts Group, or BTEX, formed in 2004. BTEX has focused on practical information sharing, workshops, and exercises to help member countries develop their domestic response capabilities. Formally, the BTEX group reports up to the Nonproliferation Directors' Group (NPDG), which in turn feeds into the Senior Leaders' meetings and final summit documents. (In practice, there has been little policy-level discussion in BTEX, and hence little reporting or discussion in the NPDG). Roma-Lyon is the G8 forum for discussions on international terrorism and transnational organized crime, and receives reports from a variety of subgroups dealing with specific topics under this broad rubric. MacDuff's reference to Roma-Lyon presumably would entail shifting BTEX into this alternative reporting chain.

¶4. (SBU) While BTEX has performed much useful work, our sense is that interest in BTEX among G-8 members is uneven and lower than we would like. In recent meetings, we have begun soliciting the views of other members on how the expert group could be made more useful to them, and in particular, how to engage Russia more actively on this subject. We have also informally raised some ideas on possible future

directions in order to stimulate discussion. This GOC inquiry is an excellent opportunity to explore the future of BTEX further.

15. (SBU) Regional security bodies, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), are taking greater interest in developing regional and coordinated approaches to prevention and response as awareness is raised on these issues. The U.S. succeeded in getting bioterrorism and biosecurity issues into the ARF Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) work plan, and it will be one of three core areas for the CTTC to address over the next two years. As a first activity associated with the CTTC, the U.S. and the Philippines will co-chair the ARF workshop on Biological Threat Reduction to be held in Manila, Philippines, June 2009. Further potential workshops may be coordinated with other donors in the region through trilateral strategic dialogues.

16. (SBU) KEY POINTS:

-- Managing the threat posed by bioterrorism is a complex problem, with multiple audiences and sets of issues. These differing audiences and issue sets are often best addressed in different multilateral settings. BTEX is one important forum that has carried out useful work.

-- We want to ensure that the group is focused on work that is important to BTEX members, while also ensuring that BTEX continues to complement, rather than duplicate, work done under UNSCR 1540, the BWC Annual Work Plan, the Global Health Security Initiative, and other venues.

-- We would be interested in Canada's views on whether the topics BTEX has addressed to date (decontamination, food defense, forensic epidemiology) remain priorities, and whether any new areas of work should be added. Should the focus remain squarely on detection and response issues, or should prevention measures (e.g., laboratory biosecurity) be addressed as well?

-- We believe that more frequent, regularly-scheduled policy-level BTEX meetings would be of interest, and would help to focus the work of the group. Such meetings could lead to more structured, forward-thinking workplans for exercises and workshops, as well as identifying policy issues or recommendations that should be reported to the NPDG and/or senior leaders.

-- We have no plans to expand the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism to encompass bioterrorism, which would dilute the focus of that important effort.

-- We do not believe that shifting BTEX to the Roma-Lyon group would, in itself, be useful in energizing the group or increasing policy focus, though we would certainly welcome Canadian views on this matter. At the March NPDG meeting, the Russian representative (Director for Security and Disarmament Affairs Anatoliy Antonov) argued that the NPDG was not an appropriate forum for discussion of bioterrorism, although the counter-terrorism official representing Russia at the Tokyo BTEX meeting had expressed interest in cooperating further with the U.S. on bioterrorism issues. It is not clear, however, that if BTEX were shifted to Roma-Lyon, the Russian officials with responsibility for that channel would be any more supportive of policy discussion.

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